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RELATION OF NATURE-STUDY TO CLAY-MODELING.

It has been the subject of some comment that the art work done by children of the eighth grade is scarcely less crude than that done by first-grade children. The drawings of the older children show less naïveté than those of the younger children, but there is very little compensating gain in technical skill. And yet the children have industriously and with unabated enthusiasm drawn, painted, and modeled through all of the intermediate grades. These results have been the more surprising in view of the fact that school conditions would seem in some respects to be almost ideal for the study of art.

No better basis could be found for the study of composition than that offered in the work now being done in history, literature, and dramatic art, and no better opportunity for the close study of natural forms than in the field of natural science. Students of design should find a wealth of material in the field and under the microscope in the nature-study laboratory.

Perhaps the most encouraging results of this work in schools have been obtained in connection with the nature-study; and in this fact may be found a clue to the situation. Much of the drawing or modeling in the field has necessarily been hastily done. This sketchy work is, however, supplemented by a more careful study in the laboratory from living specimens brought to the school for this purpose. For instance, while studying the swamp, frogs and other living creatures found on this area have been kept in aquaria and modeled with the idea of making as complete a record as possible of the life of this region, and in order, also, that a study, at close range, might be made of the structural adaptation of these creatures to their environment. If all of this material could be utilized by teachers of art, it should be possible to dispense entirely with the so-called "still-life studies" modeled for the purpose strictly of acquiring technical skill. There should be, in other words, an abundance of "still-life studies" which are vitalized by their connection with other work—which are, in fact an actual necessity of the other work.

An effort is now being made to provide, in the study of the human figure also, conditions which will offer a middle course between the "life class," in which the entire class works from a model placed by an instructor in some more or less meaningless pose, and the "free expression," which forces the student in the representation of the human figure to draw entirely upon the meager information which he may have acquired in casual observation. These conditions should be possible in the art expression required in the study of history and literature. It is usually desirable in studying history, for example, that each child of a group model at the same time a different phase of the same subject. Each child, having his own composition in mind, needs only the privilege of posing the model himself, in order that he may, in this way, answer the questions that may have occurred to him in an effort to express his own thought. The fact that in many instances one model must serve an entire group is, of course, a distinct advantage, since no student can for a very long period work directly from the model.

Children need constantly to be brought into a closer and more sympathetic relation with nature, and it is to the teachers of "nature-study" that we must look for much of the impetus in this direction.

The great sculptor and equally great teacher, M. Rodin, was once asked by a group of students for some help in the study of composition. "Ah!" said he, "that I cannot give you. What is composition? Take your sketch-books, stand at the street corner, and study the grouping of children at play, of the women who gossip on the curb, of the men who gather around the horse that has fallen in the street—that is composition—life!"

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